

# Storm Warrior (The Grim Series) (3 page)

Morgan took the proffered book—

*A Field Guide to the Ghosts of Wales*

—and thumbed through it. The older woman had collected several paranormal writings along the tour and probably had enough to fill a suitcase by now. Morgan had never met anyone who was so enthralled by supernatural topics. Well, there

*was*

her veterinary partner Jay...He seemed to be enthralled with anything that was strange or unusual. She was certain she'd never get a word in edgewise if Jay and Gwen should ever meet.

"Every single castle, hotel, pub, and crossroads we've seen so far has allegedly been haunted," Morgan said. "I'm starting to wonder if the locals make up ghost stories on purpose to attract tourists."

Gwen laughed heartily, her voice like a cheerful cadence of bells. "Well, now, child, they've certainly attracted me!" Still chuckling, she took the book back and began reading a passage aloud.

Morgan didn't have to wonder what her Welsh grandmother would have said. Nainie Jones had been certain of the existence of spirits, just as she had firmly believed in the Tylwyth Teg, the Fair Ones. As a child, Morgan had listened for hours to her grandma's faery stories, hanging on every word. Believing. But by the time Morgan reached her early teens, her belief had naturally faded. More than that, she'd discovered the fascinating world of science and already knew she wanted a career in veterinary medicine. She still loved to hear Nainie's stories, of course, but had mentally filed them with Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny. Her grandmother had sensed the change.

"Some people don't believe because they're afraid to, or they believe and hope they're never proved right. There are many things all around us that are old and powerful," Nainie had explained one day. "Magics and mysterious realms, strange peoples not of this world. They're not to be feared but to be respected, and it's long been a gift in our family to know them. If you keep your heart and your mind open, one day

*a leap of knowing*

will come to you too." Nainie had pulled the shiny silver necklace from inside her dress and looped the long, cool chain around her granddaughter's neck. She pointed to the carved medallion with the smooth, polished stones surrounding it. "This has been in our family for generations, and it's time it came to you. Keep it with you until your heart calls for it, my darling one. It'll help you to have faith, and it'll show you truth when you need it most."

Morgan had had no idea what Nainie was talking about. It felt like another faery tale.

*A leap of knowing*

—what on earth was that? It sounded like her grandmother was talking about her uncanny ability to sense the future. After all, Nainie had always known who was at the door before they had a chance to knock, what was in the mail before the postman brought it, and sometimes what was going to happen to a friend or relative several days in advance. But Morgan didn't have a psychic bone in her body, as far as she could tell.

Her grandmother wouldn't explain further, just assured her that she would learn for herself in due time. Morgan was pleased with the necklace, however, and solemnly promised Nainie she would take good care of it. Later, alone in her room, Morgan promised herself to someday visit Wales and see the land that had sparked all the wonderful old stories. Years had passed before she could finally manage the trip, but she wasn't disappointed. The tiny country was beautiful, rich with quaint charm and friendly

people, and she felt comfortingly close to her beloved grandmother at every turn.

*I guess that's what I was really looking for.*

Morgan deeply missed the woman who had raised her. As Gwen finished reading the tale of the Cross Keys ghost, Morgan smiled at her. "You know, I've always wanted to visit Wales, but it's been extra nice to meet you on the tour and travel together. I hope it doesn't offend you if I say it's a little bit like having Nainie along."

"What a lovely thing to say, dear," said Gwen. "How could I be offended when it's obvious you loved her very much?"

"I guess I talk about her a lot, don't I?"

"Not the way you think. You point out places and things she's spoken of. Why don't you tell me more? You said that you lived with her."

"My parents died in a boating accident when I was five, and so I went to live with my grandmother in Spokane..." They were all the family each other had left, but it had been enough. Nainie Jones had a generous spirit and had loved Morgan with a marvelous blend of humor and patience. And Morgan had felt her grandmother's pride in her at every turn, from the first time she walked to kindergarten by herself to the day she left for veterinary college on a full scholarship.

"Nainie told me such wonderful stories, and she taught me through them too. If I did something wrong, she always had a story that would show me why I shouldn't do that again." Morgan laughed. "It usually worked, at least when I was younger. When you're sixteen, it's tough to be afraid of the Fair Ones stealing you away!"

Gwen's eyes twinkled. "At that age, I imagine not being asked to dance would be far more terrifying than the faery folk."

"I didn't know what  
*terrifying*

was until Nainie died." Morgan had been in her third year of veterinary school when it had happened. "It was so unexpected. She'd always seemed so healthy, so full of life. But she passed away in her sleep. The doctor said it was her heart."

"I'm so sorry, dear. You must have been devastated."

"I was." It had been a terrible blow, bringing back all the pain and loss she'd felt as a little girl when her parents didn't come home. And

*fear*

...This time, she was totally and completely alone in the world.

Study was therapy and so was work, and Morgan had thrown herself ever deeper into both. Within a few years of graduation, she had built up a thriving veterinary practice and had brought in two partners to help handle the volume of clients. The extra hands meant she could finally take a break, and it was long overdue. Morgan passed over the bright flyers advertising exotic destinations and told the travel agent to book her a trip to Wales.

"So here I am," Morgan finished. "I can't help but wonder if Nainie would be pleased if she knew I was here."

Gwen's bright eyes looked far away for a moment. "I think those who have gone on are very happy to know that they are still cherished." Then her gaze turned mischievous. "And I'm certain your grandmother would have enjoyed it thoroughly when you asked the shopkeeper for a purple cat yesterday."

Morgan put her hands to her face. "Omigod, that was  
so

embarrassing! I grew up hearing Nainie speak the language, but I never quite got the hang of the pronunciation myself. You're right; she sure would have laughed at that one." In fact, Morgan could almost hear the rich, deep chuckle that had seemed so huge for such a little woman. No one had a laugh quite like that, although Morgan had heard snippets and echoes of it on her trip, especially in a family pub the night before last. It was said

that the Welsh laughed with their entire bodies, and it certainly seemed to be true.

Gwen looked over her shoulder, then back at Morgan. "You know, dear, I'm not really up to date on what girls consider handsome these days. Tell me, do you think that silver-haired fellow at the bar is good looking?"

"Mmm, not bad at all. But the one standing by the door has a much better butt."

It was a game they'd played almost every night of the tour, and it set the tone for the rest of the evening. The two women talked and giggled like high school girls throughout the meal, even more so when Gwen ordered chocolate cheesecake for each of them.

"This is so decadent!" Morgan laughed, picking off a decorative curl of shaved chocolate and popping it into her mouth.

"Not at all. One must take their pleasures where they can find them. Besides, I heard one of the ladies on the bus say that calories consumed while vacationing don't count."

"I sure hope not, or I'm going to have to pay an extra baggage fee on the plane just for all the pounds I'm gaining."

A woman with a seeing-eye dog passed their table, and the black Lab reminded Morgan of the strange dog that had been following the bus. A sudden impulse had her flagging the waiter. “Do you have a bone left over from that lovely roast?” she asked him. “It’s for a pet.”

“Of course. I’ll be glad to wrap that up for you, miss.”

As he disappeared, Gwen leaned over. “My goodness. Is that for what I think it is?”

“I can’t help it,” Morgan said and laughed. “I’m a veterinarian, so I have a compulsion to look after animals. And if I wasn’t a vet, I’d

*still*

be worrying that the dog was hungry. Or lonely. Or something. I thought I’d get the bone just in case.” In case she ever got close enough to the huge black mastiff to offer it.

The hotel room was plunged into blackness when Gwen switched off her reading lamp. “Oh my. Is that too dark for you, dear?”

“No, it’s just fine, thanks. I sleep better when it’s like this.” In fact, it was almost *country*

dark—obviously, there were no streetlights on this side of the building. Morgan was pleasantly reminded of the old farmstead she had moved to just outside of Spokane Valley. There, the dark was peaceful. She seldom even turned on the yard light, preferring the stars and the moon at most.

“You’re a brave girl. Aren’t you even a teeny bit frightened to have that great black beast following you everywhere? Why, it gives me the shivers to know that it’s a harbinger of death.”

Morgan imagined Gwen had the same kind of shivers that many people did—there was a certain deliciousness to such fear and an eagerness for more. It was human nature to be fascinated by mysterious things, especially scary things. “I’m sure he’s not following me; he’s just following the bus.”

As a vet, Morgan had observed that pets could develop just as many neuroses and odd behaviors as their owners. In her own practice, there was an Alsatian that insisted on following the family’s kids to school and waiting for them outside the fenced grounds—even though the school was four miles away and the children were driven there. The dog’s behavior was understandable on some level, but the urge persisted even if it was a weekend and the children were at home. Unless tied up, the dog would make the journey, every single day.

The mastiff must have a similar compulsion. Why he chose to follow the tour bus around, Morgan couldn’t imagine. Maybe the bigger the dog, the bigger the object of its obsession. She’d already checked with the bus driver, but the man was new and had never seen the animal before. The young tour guide was no help either. Thank

goodness there were just a handful of miles between towns in this very tiny country. Still, she fell asleep wishing she could do something for the enormous canine.

The dream began with a scent. The smell of cool, damp earth and rain and the faint whiff of horses. She was naked, lying on furs and facing the open door of a tent made of skins. The breeze was slight but enough to make her shiver and cause her nipples to harden. Her ass was warm, however. In fact, her entire backside was heated, pressed tightly against a very large, very male body. Not a stranger, although in the whimsical reality of dreams, she didn't know who he was. She wasn't afraid, although she could feel the rock-hard muscles of his arms, his chest. He was a powerful man, yet every instinct told her that she knew him as well as she knew herself—she could feel the bond between them more powerfully than even his touch. As if on cue, his large hand, calloused and work-hardened, slid over her hip and traveled gently upward. Her skin tingled deliciously beneath the rough palm, and she shivered again, not from cold but from pleasure as his hand rubbed over her breasts, fondling and squeezing.

His hot breath tickled the back of her neck as he applied soft open-mouthed kisses and measured bites. His broad fingers tugged softly at her nipples until she felt an answering tug deep in her core. She writhed, impatient for more. His hand slid between her legs where she was already slick. He teased at her clit then stroked her deeply until she gasped.

*Now, now, now*

...She

ground her ass into his groin, feeling his erection thick and hot, wanting it inside her, filling her, claiming her...

Suddenly, a deafening crash overwhelmed all her senses. It filled the entire world, echoed and re-echoed, and Morgan sat bolt upright, clutching her ears. Where the hell was she? Lightning strobed away the darkness, and she recognized the hotel room.

Her head was ringing as she sat there, waiting for her heart rate to slow down. Although whether it was hammering from fright or arousal, she couldn't say. A cold blast of wind made her look up to see rain slanting inside the open window.

*Oh crap.*

Morgan got up, slipping a little on the wet hardwood floor as she reached for the window frame. Nothing happened. She struggled for several minutes to work the old sash window loose. It jerked and slid only an inch at a time, as she tried to remember if the classic advice to stay away from windows during thunderstorms was true. Finally, the casement was closed, and the storm, which must have been passing directly overhead when it awakened her, moved off toward the north.